

# **Blending Common Sense And Scientific Inquiry In Democratic And Emancipatory Education The Philosophies Of Dewey And Freire's Curricula As Applied To Provide People With Social Freedom And Rights Throughout The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to review Dewey's Democratic and Freire's Emancipatory notions of education mainly presented in their books: "Democracy and Education", and "Pedagogy of the oppressed". In addition, it aims to examine the philosophies of Dewey and Freire's Curricula and the nature of the subject matter as applied to provide people with social freedom and rights in the twenty-first century. The paper also discusses the crucial role of the teacher in challenging the dilemmas and the reality dominating schools today.

**Keywords:** Democratic Education, Emancipatory Education, curriculum, subject matter, the role of the teacher.

## **Introduction**

Education is considered the corpus of human societies, through which civilizations developed and humanity reinforced. It is a human right advocated by international covenants as a means for the improvement of individuals and societies, and consequently a bridge for crossing toward a bright and prosperous future. It is globally observed that human societies of different identities and orientations are placing education at highest priorities. Education is considered a source of empowerment and an effective tool for meeting challenges, mitigating risks, and addressing problems, especially within developing societies as they follow their development strategies.

People are identified by the extent to which citizens claim their right to education, as it is exposed to flagrant violations around the world for various reasons such as occupation, security

instability, political administration, lack of resources, etc. Individuals live under the weight of all these conditions oppressed, and deprived of real education that develops their awareness, stimulates their creativity, and advances their nation and their homelands.

John Dewey and Paulo Freire were the most influential philosophers of education since the last century. The term "Learning by Doing" is coined by the American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) whose impact on education was evident through his theory of social learning, a major pillar for modern educational thoughts and concepts. He believed that students learn best when they are in their natural social environment as schools should be representative of such environments.

Paulo Freire, another philosopher of education (1921 -1997), was concerned for those in his native Brazil who were subjected to colonial

oppression. He came to understand that the causes of both illiteracy and poverty were deeply rooted authoritarian attitudes that pervaded all facets of society, including how parents interacted with their children. Influenced by John Dewey, Freire saw that education is more than learning skills; it's also about helping individuals uncover their own creative potential and becoming more human.

### **Democratic and Emancipatory Education**

John Dewey who introduced “Democratic Education” was a pragmatist, progressive, educator, philosopher, and social reformer. In fact, his philosophy of education is about more than just “learning by doing” as he considers teaching, learning, education, and discipline to be closely associated with community and social life. Education is a lifelong process upon which our democracy is built, as he said eloquently: “Education is not preparation for life. Education is life itself”. Democracy and education in Dewey’s view are two sides of the same coin. Both involve and encourage participation in the common good, self-development, and self-determination, through listening to the voice of the learner, while being enlightened by the scientific spirit. He considered traditional schools that teach through passive absorption as “medieval”. He emphasizes: “Children are first and foremost interested in moving, communicating, exploring the world, constructing, and expressing themselves artistically” (Dewey, 1934; Dewey, 1922).

Dewey designed a model school to bring the classroom closer to the outside world as he sees the school mandate is to be a reflection of the larger society outside the walls. As such, he sees that the school curricula should encompass social, economic, and political issues (Dewey, 1997).

The need to move away from rote memorizing of information and toward open inquiry procedures was at the core of his educational innovations. He believed that a good education taught people how to solve problems and interact with their society

more effectively. Students must participate actively in discussions and practices by asking questions continually.

“Emancipatory Education” is an educational theory presented by Freire, born from the womb of the culture of silence that characterized the world in which he lived. It came as a response to the traditional system and the banking model of education that considers minds as empty vessels filled with knowledge, burdening them with mechanisms that rely on memorization and indoctrination, shackling free, critical, and creative thinking. Freire’s theory suggests a type of education that is based on practical experience and that unleashes the mind and develops thinking and self-awareness. It is based on daring to imagine and change from within, so the learner strives to know himself, his surroundings, and his world, in order to live in a free educational atmosphere instead of just receiving information, and thus he becomes “himself” and not “someone else” speaking through him (Ayoub, et. Al., 2014).

### **Dewey’s and Freire’s curricula**

The curriculum is a designed plan for learning that requires purposeful and proactive organization, sequencing, and management of the interactions among the teacher, the students, and the content knowledge referred to as the subject matter that we want students to acquire.

Dewey’s curriculum that enhances Democratic Education is based on the actual experiences, needs, and interests of the child, all of which are controversial to a traditional curriculum. Therefore he discusses the nature of the subject matter as follows (Dewey, 1944):

- A subject matter consists of facts observed, remembered, read, or told, and ideas implied in the process of developing a purposeful situation.
- According to Dewey, youth needs to be educated in order to maintain communal life, and the subject matter learned by a group

can't just exist for its own sake. There must be a connection between the topic and the social values of the group, as it should consist of the components of the culture to be perpetuated.

- Teachers already know what their students are learning, therefore they should keep the subject matter at hand and pay attention to the students' attitudes and reactions. They must focus on the needs and abilities of their students, not just the subject matter itself as mere knowledge is not enough.
- Dewey believes that knowledge exists in stages. Initially, it exists as the ability to act and develop with knowledge sharing. Education must recognize this step of active doing to avoid isolation from the needs of the learner and mere memorization and recitation by the learner.
- Dewey emphasizes the importance of mutual communication for knowledge because people can learn from each other's experiences. He points out that the ideal of education from elementary school to college is to acquire knowledge little by little in each area of learning depending on the learner's reaction to what has been communicated.

From a social point of view, Dewey believes that education should consist of educational materials that have social value. The curriculum must adapt to the needs of existing community life and improve lives so that the future is better than the past. For Dewey, the three R's of education (reading, writing, and arithmetic) are simply not enough and do not constitute a democratic education (Dewey, 1952).

On the other hand, Freire argues that a curriculum should be seen as the continuous construction and reconstruction of meanings of a given reality and that the basis for this constant development should be dialogue. Dialogue along with critical thinking is necessary to completely understand

one's own position in the community, the world, and that of others. They both ensure growth which is characterized by *Conscientização* (critical consciousness) and *Praxis* (action and reflection), both of which require awareness of one's own reality and taking deliberate, practical actions to challenge these realities. Therefore, he sees that "the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition for the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student... but rather the established, organized, and representation to people of the subjects they desire to know more about". As such, it's critical that the instructor is aware of the reality of the student's life and chooses themes that reflect those experiences in order to address and resolve problems through discourse (Freire, 2000). This is undoubtedly an important aspect of problem-posing schooling. The student will feel increasingly pushed and obligated to respond to that challenge if the teacher consistently chooses issues that are relevant to the student's reality. They understand the situation as connected to other issues in a wider context, not just as a single issue.

To borrow and intertwine ideas from both John Dewey and Paulo Freire, a curriculum that designates growth, should be derived from the social needs of the learners, and should involve dialogue and critical thinking all of which can ensure understanding of the injustices and inequalities in their lives to take a practical action to change such oppressions. It is then, I argue, that learning becomes active and braces what Freire noted as "breaking away from silence" imposed by oppressors, and procuring "the freedom of the learner" in Dewey's words.

### **Curricula in schools today**

Focusing on today's schools, classrooms, and curricula, we find that those which support Dewey's and Freire's theories are hard to find. Although few incorporate these theories into their curricular concepts such as Responsive Classrooms, and Montessori Schools, generally

speaking, education in most classrooms today is what Dewey described as traditional that just passes accumulated and inherited information and mere knowledge away from the pupil's interests and needs. Moreover, many recent critics have pointed out that the current school curriculum encounters this vision (Williams, 2017). And the question is: why?

Several assumptions may contribute to the traditional stature of the current curricula dominating schools today. First, Schools today prioritize content and are committed to the principle of performance competition. Most schools today find themselves in the position of determining which has more merit and are declared as a winner by their accrued credits and passed tests at the local and national levels. The final award is a social status that gives the owner more power, money, and prestige than those with less educationally certified merit. Students are therefore encouraged to focus more on winning rather than learning, and schools are encouraged to focus on classification rather than teaching. In these situations, traditional curricula work very well because students only need to study as much as they need to get the grades, credits, and degrees they want.

Another reason that traditional curricula continue to dominate as I argue is that they accommodate the conditions teachers traditionally had to teach. These curricula enable them to manage students, so they ease the control of their classrooms. In contrast, curricula described by Dewey and Freire encourage teachers to open classrooms, encourage multiple voices, encourage active and independent investigation, and relax direct control of the classroom, which could be considered as unaccepted chaos, especially in crowded classrooms.

Moving to a higher level of thinking, a third reason I assume for the failure of the Democratic and Emancipatory curricula of Dewey and Freire is that their nature in promoting critical thinking,

problem-solving, and creativity all of which form a potential threat to the policy and decision-makers. By contrast, traditional curricula by concentrating on the banking model of education and assuming that the role of education is to fill their minds with mere knowledge, thus reducing their self-awareness and creativity, give the governors a hand to build generations that are easy to control.

### **The role of the teacher**

All the previously mentioned might give the retains of the traditional dynamics and curriculum in classrooms today a good excuse. These challenges characterize many educational systems especially in the third world by being authoritarian, represented by curricula built for indoctrination, an assessment that measures the lowest levels of knowledge, which is memorization and remembrance, and an educational policy that reflects the policy of a state whose goal is to build a submissive generation, managed, and obedient to the orders of its masters (Marzuk & Ali, 2012).

Under these circumstances, and until a decision should be made about why we should teach these subjects at all, if the teachers want their students to be critical thinkers, positive contributors to their local society, and capable of making informed choices and decisions when they mature into adult citizens, they should adapt the imposed curricula and must be aware of teaching existing school subject matter more effectively to match Dewey's and Freire's theories. They should place emphasis on the importance and relevance of building community, building strong relationships, developing higher level thinking skills for real-life application, and following students' interests when planning for instruction. Thus, the teacher has a crucial role in challenging all these dilemmas, for if he is aware, he will strive for change, so he adapts the curricula imposed on him and changes his teaching methods, to transform the silence and awe in his

classroom into brainstorming and ideas launched from thinking minds making his students seekers of knowledge instead of being considered as a repository.

A teacher should not stand silently, idly, captive and surrender to the laws enacted by the oppressors that program minds and souls and mold them in frameworks that are far from humanity so that they could not be distinguished from other controlled creatures that are unable to make their decisions, define their goals, and make their future. Nor should he wait for an evaluation by a supervisor, whose teacher will implement the lesson as required, finish the curriculum at the specified time, and conduct the work entrusted to him by higher authorities that may also be oppressed. Instead, he has to evaluate himself according to what he has developed in terms of the intellectual talents of his students, and the creative projects, pioneering ideas, and research he came up with them.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers are the axis upon which a democratically structured school system can evolve for the equalized investment of students calling for a shift from the banking method of depositing knowledge to the dialogic method with the aim of eliminating teachers' oppression of the learners. They should offer an educational atmosphere dominated by brotherhood and affection inside and outside educational institutions, with a deep belief in humanity through awareness and a critical view that is the key to correct education, understanding the universe, and changing it.

Further, as Dewey assures that "free men need liberal education to prepare them to make good use of their freedom", Freire adds: "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world...We can also say that human existence cannot remain silent" (Freire, 2000). Hence,

every teacher must utter that true word with its sincere action and reflection, and not stop the dialogue coupled with hope (Freire, 2014). Transforming ideas into action mechanisms is a struggle in that we need to confront the oppressor, humanize the individual, and liberate him from the forces that limit his choices in order to work on social and political change, for the advancement and transcendence of his nation and country.

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